

Wisconsin Ethics Commission

For public officials

Nepotism

Although the Wisconsin Ethics Commission believes it is improper for a person to be hired by the state or a local government because he or she is a relative of a public official, it also understands that a person, otherwise qualified, should not be denied employment with the state or a local government because he or she is related to a public official. A problem arises only when the official is involved, directly or indirectly, in the hiring or promotion or supervision of a relative.

A public official may not use his or her office to bring about the state's or a local government's employment of the official's spouse or a dependent relative. [19.45(2) and 19.59(1)(a), *Wisconsin Statutes*] On the other hand, if the official is not involved in any way in the hiring, promotion or conditions of employment, there is no good reason why a person, otherwise qualified, should be denied employment by the state or a local government, or promotion in a state or local position because he or she is related to an official. Other statutory sections neither part of the Ethics Code nor administered by the Commission may also prohibit the hiring of relatives by public officials.

Nepotism involving relatives other than a spouse or legal dependent, although not specifically prohibited by the Ethics Code, should be avoided. The Commission recommends that a public official neither (1) hire or promote as an employee of the state or of a local government, nor (2) advocate the state's or a local government's employment or promotion of, nor (3) exercise jurisdiction, supervision or direction over a person to whom he or she is related as a parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, brother, sister, parent-in-law, grandparent-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew or spouse.